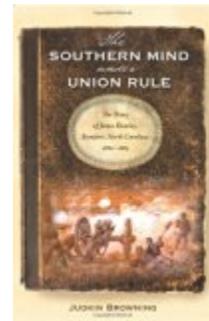


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James Rumley. *The Southern Mind under Union Rule: The Diary of James Rumley, Beaufort, North Carolina, 1862-1865*. Edited by Judkin Browning. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009. Illustrations. xv + 199 pp. \$34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8130-3407-2.

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No Place Like Home: Redefining Belief and Community under Enemy Occupation

Few things are as precious, or as sacred, as “home.” The most basic human endeavor is the quest for a sanctuary from the realities of the world outside. More than mere walls and a roof, it is a state of mind where families are forged and memories of a lifetime are made, bound together by an inimitable connection between time, place, and people. Americans traditionally have been fiercely protective of that place they have made “home.” One of the British government’s Coercive Acts decreed that Bostonians either build barracks for troops at their own expense or quarter them in their personal dwellings. The law proved so offensive that when a Bill of Rights was adopted one of the amendments banned such a practice. Over two centuries later following the tragedy of 9/11, Americans were so outraged by terrorist destruction occurring on their home soil that they wholeheartedly supported a two-front war in the Middle East and the creation of the Department of Homeland Security.

During the American Civil War, of course, the Grand Army of the Republic occupied several Southerners’ native soil. When this happened in March 1862 to Beaufort, North Carolina, a resident of that town, James Rumley, concluded that such a situation was so unique that he kept a diary of his experiences. This journal, available in *The Southern Mind under Union Rule*, is captivating not just because it is an individual’s perception of events, but also because it is a rare document of the passing of one historic era into another.

Covering the period between the beginning of Union occupation in March 1862 to the onset of Reconstruction in August 1865, Rumley’s words present an absorbing portrait of a man trapped in the twilight of the Old South: resentful of the violation of his home and his principles, yet ever hopeful of deliverance at the hands of Confederate crusaders who never arrived. In the end a new reality emerged in which all he had believed had been repudiated by war, though he was not obligated to like it. It is this last element that makes the diary beguiling, for his was the plight of every white Southerner at the close of the Civil War, whose task was to merely survive in a place in which *they* were the aliens.

At its most revealing, Rumley’s diary shows him as caught in the flux of change that he was, at first, slow to recognize. His support of the Southern cause was deeply rooted in the premise that the Union had been cut asunder by “fanatics and tyrants” devoid of civility and churlish toward “everything Southern” (pp. 35, 57). The diarist was repeatedly insulted at the actions of the Union army, from their boorishness toward the women of his hometown, to the assumption of buildings owned by his neighbors that were used for purposes that he found altogether offensive. In this cause none were spared the resentment of his pen.

For example, though Rumley was careful to catalogue every indignity suffered at the hand of the occupying army, none was more infuriating to him than the in-

cessant need of the enemy to force his neighbors into swearing oaths of allegiance to the United States in order to simply survive. In one passage, the diarist argued that loyalty to one's state is a responsibility that a citizen "cannot conscientiously abjure" without violating both the law and the community (p. 63). Even as the defeat of the Confederacy was imminent, the writer eloquently criticized those who had lost hope: "If they think they can abandon their country in this manner, in her hour of trial, and affiliate with her enemies and not be remembered hereafter as deserters and traitors, we think they are mistaken" (p. 155).

At its most disturbing, Rumley's abhorrence of the change forced on him by the occupying army is best summarized by his unremitting use of the phrases "niggerdom" and "niggerism" (p. 59). Though historically these sections are an accurate sentiment of a specific place and time, the change in social sensitivities has made them difficult to read. To the diarist the very notion that African Americans were equal to whites was absurd and, in his assessment, the root cause of the war itself (p. 60). Therefore, to recruit them into the armed forces and provide them with arms was, in his view, an insult to both himself and his God. As such, nearly every crime that Rumley reported was connected to either the actions or the influence of the freed and/or armed slaves, or as he described them the "deluded wretches, lured by the sweet sounds of liberty," a condition that had allowed them to run amok in his community (p. 59).

Yet, in all of Rumley's venomous tirades against freedom for "this benighted race," he also argued that educating freed slaves was not necessarily wrong. The diarist persuasively advocated a model in which Southern whites would play freedpeople's "benefactors" by providing schools that taught them to read and to write. In contrast, he claimed that schools established by the occupying forces had effectively filled "the minds of the negroes with mortal hatred for the whole white population of the state" (p. 99). It is a remarkable irony that an unrepentant racist could come to such a conclusion.

Finally, in his diary's most moving passages, Rumley experienced the death of the dream at the heart of his resistance to Union occupation. At every turn the diarist's defiance, disdain, and disgust against the "Yankee" were rooted in the forlorn hope of Southern independence. As the enemy desecrated his community—a condition he described as akin to living in "the House of Satan and very gate of Hell"—the writer took comfort in the thought that

these minions of the devil would be dealt a punishment by the redeemers that was "fearful to contemplate" (p. 45). Furthermore, because he was a true believer in the Confederacy the bittersweet nature of his observations are simultaneously heartbreaking and breathtaking. As news of Confederate losses began to mount, and as the author contemplated the future, his personal gloom increased, expressed in one of the most powerful entries of the entire work: "Our political light grows darker. The light which, a little while ago, was breaking from the Peace party of the North and rising like a bright aura above the northern horizon, has been suddenly obscured and succeeded by the blackness of midnight; and the vice of peace is heard no more, while far over the water, where millions of the south have long bent their anxious looks and fondly imagined of late the day star of their hopes was rising. Clouds and shadows darkened the sky; and over head and all around a could-like, starless canopy bounds the vision" (pp. 86-87).

By the war's final year, Rumley rued the "long dreary night of despotism" and yearned for an end to "the hour of this worse than polar night" (p. 128). When the diarist contemplated the setbacks suffered by the South in battle after battle, he rationalized that the cause must be baptized in blood to be sanctified. Yet, as news of General Robert E. Lee's surrender at Appomattox reached his home town, it was clear that the diarist was emotionally exhausted. After praising Lee's Army of Northern Virginia as the greatest fighting force for the duration of the war, Rumley simply resigned himself to fate with a quote from John Milton: "All is lost" (p. 171).

It would not be a difficult task to ruminate further on this book, for each passage is articulate and fascinating. The editor Judkin Browning, assistant professor of military history at Appalachian State University, has produced a remarkable volume that deepens our understanding of Southern resistance under the direst of circumstances. His care and precision in preparing the text are noteworthy in that though spelling and grammatical errors have been corrected, the literary flow of the diary itself allows the vivid personality of the author to remain the center of attention. Additionally, the painstaking research clearly evident in both the introduction and the sources notes is informative and unobtrusive. Thus, by being consistently mindful of the value of his source document, and of his role in its production, Browning has added a rich and necessary addition to the vast body of works on the American Civil War.

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